



Committee on Labor and Public Employees

Public Testimony of the Connecticut Women's Education and Legal Fund
Governor's Bill No. 6850: *An Act Concerning Pay Equity and Fairness*
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CWEALF is a statewide non-profit organization dedicated to empowering women, girls and their families to achieve equal opportunities in their personal and professional lives. For years, CWEALF has been a leader in advocating for policies that address discrimination and workplace policies, including Connecticut's gender wage gap.

As an organization that continuously seeks to promote rights and opportunities for women and their families throughout the state, CWEALF supports Governor's Bill No. 6850: *An Act Concerning Pay Equity and Fairness* as a progressive step forward in minimizing the gender wage gap that continues to plague Connecticut's workforce. By prohibiting employers from discouraging workers to disclose, inquire or discuss the amount of his or her wages or the wages of another employee, Connecticut will make strides in reducing pay secrecy practices that have halted conversations about the state's gender wage gap.

As a member of the Gender Wage Gap Task Force in 2013, CWEALF along with several other advocates, identified pay secrecy practices as a major factor in the slower compensation growth of women workers. In workplace environments that withhold information or discourage conversations to negotiate salary options, women are unlikely to know whether they are being paid fairly.

Lilly Ledbetter, perhaps the most well-known victim of pay inequity said, "I thought I was earning good pay. I thought they were treating me fairly."ⁱ But because her company had a pay secrecy policy, she did not find out until 20 years later than she was earning far less than her male coworkers.

Although the Taskforce found no direct link between pay secrecy and the gender wage gap, it should be noted that in the federal government, where pay information is public, the total gender wage gap is only 11%, half of Connecticut's overall rate of 22%.ⁱⁱ The gender wage gap is also much smaller among union members, where pay secrecy practices are less common.

Policies that promote pay transparency therefore supply women with valuable information to prepare for conversations to negotiate starting salaries and pay raises. Although Connecticut and the rest of the nation have a long journey ahead in achieving pay equity, policies

that eliminate the pay secrecy practices perpetuating the gender wage gap are progressive strides in reducing workforce discrimination and ensuring equal pay for equal work.

The current gender wage gap is more than a “women’s issue” – it is an economic concern that will continue to hinder Connecticut’s economic growth unless the state begins to take the necessary steps in eliminating pay discrepancies. In today’s workforce, women play an increasingly important role in securing the financial stability of their families; however, an estimated 24% of households in Connecticut headed by women with children fall below the federal poverty level.ⁱⁱⁱ Taking steps to eliminate the gender wage gap will provide critical income to these families.

In order to take the first strong step to end pay inequity, CWEALF supports Governor’s Bill No. 6850: *An Act Concerning Pay Equity and Fairness* as a way to encourage workers to discuss salary and pay discrepancies. By reducing employer practices that dissuade workers from discussing wages, Connecticut will bring the issue of pay equity to the forefront of workplace conversations.

ⁱ Bar-Lev, Abigail, “*I Thought They Were Treating Me Fairly, or, Honoring Lilly Ledbetter by Eliminating Pay Secrecy Policies*,” National Women’s Law Center, January 29, 2015, www.nwlc.org/our-blog/.

ⁱⁱ The Gender Wage Gap Task Force. (2013). *The Gender Wage Gap in Connecticut: Findings and Recommendations*. Retrieved from:

http://www.governor.ct.gov/malloy/lib/malloy/2013.11.19_gender_wage_gap_in_ct.pdf.

ⁱⁱⁱ Id.